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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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OBEDIENCE;

OR

THE PLACE OF MILITARY DISCIPLINE IN EDUCATION.

BY T. G. ROOPER, M.A., H.M.I.

(Continued from page 281.)

IT is to be observed that this power may be encouraged by exercises which are almost wholly pleasant to the little child, and this is one of the inner and less obvious values of kindergarten games and drills. Of course, if the exercises are carelessly done, if the games are played as we say, "without spirit," if directions are only half followed, if there is any dilatoriness and slackness in the execution of orders, they fail of their effect in training the child to acquire that power of acting with promptness and precision, which may be called muscular obedience. Hence the immense advantage of teaching children to play together in organised games. They may be taught to insist on each other's playing the game properly and exactly, and to learn the practice of correct play and to avoid overlooking mistakes of carelessness, confusion or insubordination. They will learn from themselves not to tolerate mistaken kindness, which allows a slipshod and flabby practice even of a game. I need not say that in my opinion, cricket and football professionally taught and played are simply continuation kindergarten games, and like them of the highest educational value. I accept, then, military discipline thus explained as the physical basis of obedience, and think that it may well be imparted to children through games and drills, but obedience must be moral and rational before it is really human. For military drill can be taught to a horse and other animals, such as birds, and even performing fleas. Some children's movements resemble those of grasshoppers. I never heard of a performing grasshopper, but before training some mercurial youths I should recommend the teacher to practice his 'prentice hand upon drilling a pair of these creatures with their vigorous but unpredictable

boundings. Starting with a training which partakes of the nature of military drill, and prompt obedience or power to execute an order smartly, whether the order be "fire" or "fetch your grammar," I proceed to consider the nature of moral and rational obedience.

I have said that a good many practical people insist upon the absurdity of reasoning with a little child. It is urged that a child seldom understands reasoning, and if he does he may win a triumph over you, either because he is clever in making the worse appear the better cause, or because his limited experience prevents him from seeing what nonsense he talks, or even because he happens to have right and reason on his side.

Miss Agnes Grey's fault, it may be said, was that she overlooked this truth, making herself hoarse with reasoning and argument. A child's treasury of ideas and experience is nearly empty. He knows little of the results of actions. For a boy there are no such things as noise, disorder or dirt. He regards all this with pleasure, or at least with pure indifference. He will go birds'-nesting in his new hat and coat, and laugh aloud at wisest aunt telling of saddest tale. He enjoys crude colour, strong lights, and hideous contrasts. He loves caricature, while things out of harmony and proportion amuse him in the same degree as their grossness. A mile long ribbon of scarlet geranium, yellow calceolaria, and blue lobelia, at which Mr. Morris would have shrunk, would make a boy cry "how jolly," and then he would gather the flowers and stamp on the border. Children again often seem much more heartless than they really are. Their want of sympathy and readiness to inflict pain whether on animals or on grown-up people is often due to ignorance. It is of no use to appeal to principles of humanity with a cruel boy, such as Agnes Grey describes, who would tear off the legs of living fledglings because you are appealing to the very principles which you wish to instil into the child, and which as yet he has not acquired. I do not think, however, that it is always a mistake to reason with a child, but rather that it is easy to reason in a mistaken way. When you have established a good principle in a child's mind then you can reason from it. He forgets it or fails to see its application. You can remind him of it or explain the application.

How then should Agnes Grey have dealt with her heartless Tom? I expect that if she had managed to procure for him some animal which he could have kept as a pet and learnt to take care of, watching it and interesting himself in its ways, she could have effected a considerable change for the better. This, I take it, is pure Frœbelian doctrine. At least he would have shown kindness to one animal, and the disposition could be further cultivated. If a child is unkind or even cruel to younger or weaker children, it is useless to reason about the evils of tyranny and selfishness. The remedy is to place the small "bully" in the position of protector to some particularly weak child. Similarly, if a boy or girl evince a taste for staring contrasts in colour, there is no use in appealing to the general principles of æsthetics. The remedy is to call their attention to the arrangement of colour in some beautiful picture, or in some beautiful piece of textile fabric.

The child can act upon mental images before he can act (consciously) upon abstract principles. He can be kind, for instance, to a playfellow at school who has just left home for the first time, long before he can appreciate at all adequately the golden maxim, "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you." Simple acts which he may be led to perform with a little tact on the part of his elders will form a reservoir in his mind, from which subsequently reasoned action may flow in steady stream. A boy can divide the contents of a hamper among his companions, long before he can assimilate the doctrine of the "greatest happiness of the greatest number." There is a wide difference between wholly ignoring the undeveloped reasoning powers of the child, and adapting your appeal to reason to his miniature intellect. It is waste of time to appeal to principles before they are formed in his mind. The right way to build up good principles is to make a judicious use of carefully chosen occasions, and wherever it is possible, without wearying the child, to explain the bearing of the action.

If a child is accustomed never to learn the reason for a command, he is apt to look upon all directions as purely arbitrary, and he tacitly believes and acts on the belief that he may without offence do almost anything he is not expressly forbidden. "Jack, don't rest your dusty feet upon the cushion of the opposite seat. It is not nice for the next passenger to

sit on a dusty seat. You may spoil somebody's dress." If you give a reason where you conveniently can, and where the reason is easily understood by the child, you may implant in him a belief (sometimes unfounded) that you always have a good reason for controlling his actions, and that you don't give unnecessary and merely harassing directions. If an appeal to reason is of little value to the child, it is of great value to the parent or teacher. An order or command involves a virtue in two persons. There must be a virtue in the issuer of the order as well as in the recipient. Agnes Grey had to deal with high-spirited children. She would regard them as thoroughly disobedient. They would regard her as always thwarting them and restraining them from doing what they wished. She would appear never as a help, but always as a hindrance to their pleasures. The more exuberant the vital force in children the more lively are their actions, the more unexpected their turns and changes of amusement. The caprice of the moment is the "lawless law of their behaviour." No action seems to lead up to any other.

At one moment all is harmony and friendship in a group, an instant later all is quarrelling and discord. Their companionship, like an April day, is an alternation of sunshine and showers, laughter and tears. The children's acts in this case are not in themselves good or bad. They are, however, apt to be appraised as moral actions according to a false standard, and to be praised, or blamed, or viewed with indifference, amusement, or indignation, according as they affect grown people. This more or less chance attitude of their elders towards juvenile high spirits does not help to establish in the child a sense of justice. It is not just to laugh at a child for his smart saying where it amuses, and punish him when it gives offence. The fact is that no wise person will leave their children to their own caprices for long together. The habit of acting with heed is not always easy to establish, and even the burnt child does not always heed the fire. Future trouble arises when a child is habitually left to act from mere physical impulse without the accompaniment of any mental effort in directing the action and giving it purpose, and thereby subjecting the physical impulse to mental control. Aimless romping with its accompaniment of noise may reduce the exuberance of animal spirits, but it tends to enslave the will.

One remedy is to help children to find out and play at properly organised games such as prisoners' base, for young boys, cricket and football for older ones, where shouting and muscular activity are directed to some purpose, and hence become necessarily subject to the players' control. Let us follow the boy who has been left to play at his own caprice into later life. He becomes a youth, a hob-a-de-hoy. The feeling "I can," grows with his growth and strengthens with his strength. The well-founded sense of power issues in a desire to do, but his vague desire to do is unaccompanied with any operation of the intellect. Unaccustomed to act with a purpose even in play he has acquired the opposite habit, and finds action which is directed or controlled most distasteful. He seems to love to act in opposition to order and sound advice, and to desire to do what is forbidden; he shuns domestic life and orderly circles, seeking company which is coarse, vulgar, and often cruel. "*Fait ce que vous voudrez*" is his motto, and although seeking to do what he likes, he finds sooner or later, how different doing what you like is from liking what you do. High spirits are naturally associated with manliness, but it does not seem necessary that sturdy children should develop upon the unattractive lines which I have described. The old plan on which many sensible people have acted since recorded time is the right one. Much attention must be paid to finding right occupations for children throughout the day, and paying as much attention to their so-called play as to their so-called work.

I am not sure that we sufficiently realize that the chief value of the so-called work or lessons which children do is its purposefulness, and this characteristic should belong also to playtime. This also, in my opinion, is pure Frœbelianism. The real difference between work and leisure should be between occupations which are more exacting in their demands on the intellect and those which are less so. No good game like cricket or football is mere play. Neither is it right that any lesson should appear to a child to be an aimless expenditure of energy like a treadmill. I am no advocate for never leaving children to themselves, or depriving them of the chance of self-determination according to the prompting of their natural disposition, but I think it is the duty of every educator to supervise children sufficiently to see that the

occupations of their leisure however apparently trivial are purposeful, even if it consist in early years of making the humble mud-pie, or throwing stones at a mark, instead of at one another or at glass windows. The child at play, who when asked what he is playing at can only reply "Nothing," is not developing himself at all, but passing his time at the mercy of fortune which is not always kindly. It is almost entirely through Frœbel that the real meaning and use of play have been made intelligible to everyone who will devote a little attention to the subject. Animal spirits—exuberant vital force—must not be repressed, but judiciously directed and turned to some definite purpose. They must be made constructive, or else they tend to become destructive.

I began by contrasting two methods of securing obedience, reasoning and force. Agnes Grey tries to make disobedient children obey her by reasoning. Their father reduces them to obedience at once by violent language and threats. "Come in, you filthy brats, or else I'll horse-whip you every one." The failure of Agnes Grey was due to inexperience. It is useless to appeal to principles before they are formed in the mind of the child. She did not really apply the method which she intended, and her failure is no proof that her method was wrong. Nevertheless, in its ultimate result, the obedience secured by their father would have done the children more harm than the naughtiness which Miss Grey failed for the moment to put an end to.

Mr. Broomfield relied on his coercive power and nothing more. He constrained the will of his children by mere force, practically physical force. His system was the opposite of that of Frœbel. Now it seems to be a crude but not uncommon conception of law which defines it "the command of a superior who has coercive powers to compel obedience and punish disobedience," because if this be correct force is the governing idea of law, and it is hard to reconcile force with the intelligent assent of those who are subject to its influence. In place of force, if we wish to act in Frœbel's spirit, we must substitute customary action founded on general consent. Obedience to authority is dearly purchased at the cost of forfeiting respect for law or for the superior who executes it. Even as regards military organization it must be remembered that army discipline is the discipline of the *army*. The

commanding officer is no dictator issuing arbitrary orders at his own caprice. An officer who plays this part, and there have been such, soon stirs up a mutiny. The officer is the mouthpiece of the army. His commands are known to be necessary for the safety and success of the army, and his order is but the signal for each to do what he has already a mind to do. Similarly if an officer punishes one of the men, there is behind him the force of the opinion of the rest. They know that if a man sleeps on his watch or neglects a serious duty the correction must be stern. The discipline of each is essential to the collective safety of all. A French officer not long ago was detected in supplying the enemy with plans of his country's forts. He was cashiered in the presence of his regiment, his sword broken, his regimental badges torn off, and he was dismissed as a civilian. The punishment is like a great disaster in nature, such as a stroke of lightning or an earthquake. The force behind is overwhelming. There is dignity in its irresistibility. The army acts through its officers for its own good. The culprit is as a reed cottage in the path of an avalanche. On the contrary, in a small community such as the family, there can be nothing really corresponding to military discipline, for in the first place the offender's own good is of primary importance, and secondly, there is no collective force or common interest seriously jeopardised by juvenile delinquencies—if for instance he swims a paper boat on some freshly-made soup—such as invest the discipline of the army with so much dignity. The child again is not such an inconsiderable item in a family as a soldier in the army, when either member is compared with its respective whole. It appears, then, that it does matter very much in what spirit and by what means obedience is enforced among young children, for upon these things depends the conception which children, when they are grown up, will have of law and of their duty to the state and their country. If obedience is based on force alone, they will grow up with the idea that the state is as a policeman regulating traffic in a crowded thoroughfare, an officer who is more respected than loved for this office. Law will be the dictatorial command of a superior, and obeyed mainly because that superior, be the superior one or many, has power to enforce the dictates of

his or their caprice. A wise parent will early implant in the mind of the child that he gives an order not out of pure self-will, but in respect to some higher principle which controls his action. The captain of a training ship, which had caught fire, stopped a panic-stricken cadet who was hurrying over the ship's side as though he were the only person to be rescued, with the remark:—"That is not the way at sea, my lad; fall into your place." There can be no common life, whether in nursery, or schoolroom, or home, or town, or country, without the observance of certain rules of conduct, and even young children may soon be taught to feel this before they understand it. They may be taught "this is our way here," or "this is not our way here." The child must doubtless learn to do many things in response to his parents' plain order, "I tell you to do it," but by judicious use of occasion he may be made to feel that law is not his parents' word, and that behind the order there is something more than chance or the wish of the moment, something which is general in its application, and equally applying to all and certain. The child may be made to feel that he has a better self and a worse self, and that the parent is by his dictates helping the child's better self against his worse, and even in giving his command, obeying the dictates of a command himself.

A curious instance of this perception of a double self in a little child may be formed in that charming book, "W. V.: Her Book" (*Isbister*)—"We lowly folk dine before most people think of lunching, so dinner was ready when we arrived home. Now as decorum at table is one of the cardinal virtues, W. V. dines by proxy. It is her charming young friend Gladys, who gives us the pleasure of her company. It is strange how many things this bewildering daughter of mine can do as Gladys, which she cannot possibly accomplish as W. V. W. V. is unruly, a chatterbox, careless, or at least forgetful of the elegancies of the social board; whereas Gladys is a model of manners, an angel in a bib. W. V. cannot eat crusts, and as for porridge, 'I am surprised that your little girl does not like porridge. It is so good for her.' " What we want is, that boys as they grow up to manhood, should feel that law is not what is commanded by the school, college, club, regiment, association, or country to which they

belong, but that these institutions enforce what is law, that is, practice and customs actually approved by the bulk of the members, for where this is not the case, no constitution can long hang together. The spirit of Tom Brown, in which the natural and proper attitude of every healthy school boy is assumed to be one of opposition to the school authorities, cannot be really sound. Perhaps I may appear to enuntiate a paradox, but it seems to me far more important that a child should grow up with a respect for authority, than that he should be reduced to such mechanical obedience to orders as is indispensable in an army, if it is to be a perfect fighting instrument. It is not always that the directest road is the shortest way home, and the prompt response to orders which may be secured by the domestic martinet may be the foundation of a character which develops into libertinism. An apparent failure to secure momentary obedience may not in the end spoil the child, if there is a consistent and uninterrupted effort to inspire the child with a love for the sweet reasonableness which is far removed from opposition to authority. As with nations, so with nurseries our aims should be to narrow the domain of mere force as the governing factor, and to substitute a love of order and abhorrence of what is mean, and cruel and vile, and a ceaseless devotion to justice and mansuetude. It may be as Xenophon says, they who secure willing and cheerful obedience are possessed of a divine gift, and that this is incommunicable and mysterious, and that for most people in authority nothing is left but the exercise of despotic power over the will, and that kind of life which he compares to the torments of hell.

But most virtues thus exalted as superhuman are really of the simplest and plainest, and nearest to man, in short, most human. The secret of the success in command is unselfishness and consideration for others. A command, as I have said, implies two people, one to give and one to receive. If he who gives an order can always put himself readily into the position of him who is to receive it, and never issues an order which he would not himself be willing to accept as reasonable, and does not hesitate to give his order when it is reasonable, though he may be misunderstood for the moment, and occasionally make mistakes, yet in the end without any mystery he will rule with divine authority, and

escape the terrors of Tantalus in his second life always dreading a second death.

In conclusion, I will briefly resume the substance of my remarks. The foundation of the habit of obedience is muscular training which leads to the prompt response of the muscles to the will. The most striking example of such training and the results of it are seen in military drill, and examples have been given from actual warfare in which the muscles of the soldier obeyed the force of habit under circumstances which might overpower reason.

The kindergarten, games and drills, are well adapted for training the muscles of young children to prompt action. Military discipline, however, is distinguished from the law-abiding behaviour which is the foundation of civic life. Success, amid the carnage of battle, depends upon a blind habit of obedience, whereas in civic life obedience must be rational. In education we must begin with muscular training and muscular obedience, but we must not rest satisfied until we have instilled into the child a sense that law is not the arbitrary will of his elders, but rather the rule that is acted on by sensible people, and enforced by general consent. The formation of blind habits of obedience to the exclusion of reflection is not the training which leads to a just appreciation of law, and is not the way to build up the character of the young citizen. In all education there must be something austere, and even severe, but unless severity is combined with sympathy and consideration it is apt to develop a spirit of opposition to authority.

Those who are interested in the study of this subject should not fail to read (1) for its military aspect, Lieut. Stewart Murray's "Discipline" (Gale & Co., Aldershot, 2s. 6d.), and (2) for the legal aspect, the speech of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Russell, of Killowen, to the Congress of the American Bar, at Saratoga Springs, in August, 1896. This great speech, reported in *The Times*, August 21st, 1896, deserves to be widely known in this country, as it explains the nature of law in language which a layman can follow. So great was its effect at the time, that the vast audience, consisting of nearly 5,000 persons, many of them lawyers who are not given to sentiment, arose spontaneously to their feet at its conclusion, and cheered vociferously for a quarter-of-an-hour.